

Beat: Miscellaneous

## **OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT HOLLANDE ATTACKING HIS CHOICE OF LANGUAGE**

### **AN ACT OF WAR AGAINST OUR COUNTRY**

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**USPA NEWS** - The celebrated Flemish author David Van Reybrouck has written an open letter to President Hollande of France attacking his choice of language during a speech to the French people following Friday's unprecedented terrorist attacks in Paris.

Dear Mr President,

The celebrated Flemish author David Van Reybrouck has written an open letter to President Hollande of France attacking his choice of language during a speech to the French people following Friday's unprecedented terrorist attacks in Paris.

Dear Mr President,

That was a rather foolhardy choice of words in your speech on Saturday afternoon when you repeatedly spoke of an 'act of war' perpetrated by a 'terrorist army'. You said :

'What happened in Paris and Saint-Denis is an act of war and faced with war a country must take the appropriate measures. It was an act committed by a terrorist army, Daesh (IS or Isil), against what we are, a free country that speaks with the entire planet, an act of war that was prepared and planned from without with support from within that is now the subject of an investigation. It was an act of total barbarity.'

I am in total agreement with those last words, but the rest of your speech is a horrible, nearly word perfect repetition of the words of GW Bush to the US Congress shortly after the 9/11 attacks: 'The enemies of freedom have committed an act of war against our country.'

The consequences of those historic words are well known. A head of state qualifying an event as an act of war is obliged to come up with an appropriate response. It led Bush to invade Afghanistan, which is defensible as the regime provided a home for Al-Qaeda - even the UN agreed on that. This was followed by the totally mad invasion of Iraq, without UN mandate - for the sole reason that the US suspected it possessed weapons of mass destruction.

None were found, but the invasion led to the total destabilisation of the region that we witness to this day. When US troops left the country in 2011 a power vacuum ensued. When civil war broke out in neighbouring Syria shortly afterwards as part of the fallout from the Arab Spring it became clear to all how destabilising America's military intervention had been. In the North West of a dismembered Iraq and in the East of a Syria shot to bits there was room, next to the Syrian army and the FSA for the establishment of a third, major player: Isil, Isis or IS.

In short, without Bush's idiotic invasion of Iraq there would never have been any talk of IS. Millions of us demonstrated against the invasion in 2003. I was among them. It was a worldwide protest. We were right. Not that we were able to look twelve years ahead into the future. We were not that clairvoyant. But now we do realise it: what happened in Paris on Friday night is an indirect consequence of the war rhetoric that your colleague Bush employed in September 2001.

And what do you do ? How do you respond within 24 hours of the attacks ? You use exactly the same terminology that your US counterpart at the time employed. You are making wine from the same barrel.

You walked straight into it, with your eyes open, Mr President. You did it because you could feel the hot breath of Nicolas Sarkozy and Marine Le Pen in your neck. True, you already had a reputation for being a weakling. Elections are on the way on 6 and 13 December, even though these are only regional elections, following the attacks they will be dominated by national security issues.

You walked straight into it, because you gave the terrorists what they wanted: a declaration of war. With great pleasure you accepted their invitation for a Jihad. In your attempt to respond in a forthright fashion you are risking an escalation of the spiral of violence. To me this doesn't seem like a good idea.

You spoke of a 'terrorist army'. First of all, no such thing exists. It's a contradiction in terms. A 'terrorist army', that's a bit like a bulimic diet. Countries and groups can have armies, when they fail to establish one they can opt for terrorism. This means that they commit incidental actions aimed at a maximum psychological impact instead of a structural, military deployment of power involving geopolitical ambitions.

But an army ? Let's be clear: so far we do not know if the perpetrators are returning Syria fighters or people dispatched from Syria on purpose. We do not know if the attacks were planned in the caliphate or in European suburbs. Even though there are indications for a Syrian master plan (the near coincidence of the attacks in Lebanon and the Russian plane crash), it strikes me that the IS communique came late in the day and hardly contained any elements that had not circulated on the internet. Is this a question of coordination or recuperation ?

For equal measure, these could be individuals who have simply run amok, probably chiefly French nationals who have returned from Syria where they became experienced in explosives and fire arms and where they were submerged in a totalitarian ideology, cryptography and acts of war. They became monsters, but not an army.

The IS communique spoke of locations that had meticulously been chosen, your own services stress the professionalism of the perpetrators. As far as that is concerned you both speak the same language. But the facts beg to differ. The three who went to the Stade de France where you were attending a friendly against Germany seemed amateurs.

They clearly wanted to get inside, possibly to launch an attack against your person; it is possible. But whoever blows himself up next to a McDonald's and only manages to kill one other person is a poor terrorist. People who need three suicide attacks to kill four others, while minutes later a human mass of 80,000 souls sets itself in motion are bunglers.

Someone who together with four others wants to exterminate a concert hall but fails to block the emergency exit is no strategic genius. Someone who steps from a car and shoots at unarmed, innocent civilians on pavement cafes isn't a soldier schooled in tactics, but a coward, a bastard, a loner who has completely gone off the rails and who has aligned his fate with several other completely derailed individuals. It's a pack of lone wolves.

Your analysis about a 'terrorist army' does not hold water. Your term 'act of war' is exceptionally biased, even though this bellicose rhetoric has unashamedly also been adopted by the Dutch Premier Mark Rutte in the Netherlands and Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon in Belgium. In your attempt to placate your nation you threaten to make the world less safe. In your attempt to use forceful language, you have shown your weakness.

Other forms of firmness to bellicose language do exist. Immediately after the attacks in Norway Prime Minister Stoltenberg unreservedly called for 'greater democracy, greater openness and greater participation'. In your speech you spoke of freedom. You should also have pointed to two other values of the French Republic: equality and fraternity. I believe there is greater need of these at this minute than of your questionable war rhetoric.

David Van Reybrouck is the author of the award-winning 'Congo. A History'. He is a writer of prose, poetry and drama as well as an essayist.

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